

The Possible City

Exercises in Dreaming Philadelphia

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From the Introduction What is Philadelphia?

In Philadelphia, imagining a new city is a singular act of citizenship. When we look at Philadelphia, we see what might be. That tendency to see possibility around every corner comes in response to two sensations. The first is the recognition of *what isn't*. Here is the cold understanding of what, in comparison to other cities, Philadelphia lacks. The second is the awareness of *what was*. We're reminded of this ceaselessly, of the city's founding ideals, of its political, economic, and industrial prominence. In Philadelphia, William Penn sought a different kind of city, one guided by principles of tolerance and love. These are active principles in Philadelphia, and we turn to them especially in times of crisis. They help us see what might be.

We dream so intensely because a more satisfying city feels ever so tantalizingly close. We dream too because as hard and unforgiving as Philadelphia is, it also relents; any one of us it seems can mold it to the shape of our desires.

It's all there in the ruins we call the contemporary city.

With a city full of dreamers, imagine how many Philadelphians there are, how many ideas, renderings, concepts, capstones, thesis projects, studio designs, abstract scribbles, master plans, renewal plans, redevelopment plans, green plans, sustainability strategies, waterfront designs, how many dreams and ideas have been projected at scale across a plotted map of this city—and therefore just how many possible cities there are.

